

Christmas greetings and best wishes to all our readers!

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS 1948-2008

To mark the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December, we have prepared special prayer and resource material for use in churches to mark this historic milestone. Visit www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/jpitnews.htm

PRAYERS FOR BETHLEHEM DURING ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS

As Christians around the world prepare to celebrate Advent and Christmas in the security of their homes and communities, you are invited to pray for justice, peace and security for Palestine and Israel - and to send a prayer or a peace message to Bethlehem.

Once again this year, Christmas celebrations will take place in a difficult climate for people in the Holy Land. However, Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, is still first and foremost a city of peace. And even in these trying times, many individuals and groups living there refuse to give up hope. They continue to search for non-violent ways to voice their rights and work for a peaceful and just future for both Palestinians and Israelis.

Since December 2000, a new Christmas tradition has been taking shape: sending peace messages to people in Bethlehem. Individuals, communities, churches and congregations, organisations and partners from across the world are invited to e-mail Advent and Christmas wishes and prayers for justice and peace to Bethlehem. This year, the project is being carried out in collaboration with the World Council of Churches and its Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF). Wishes and prayers will be printed and handed out as personal messages, educational materials, in the context of interfaith prayers (in places of worship) and in the newly established peace house of the Arab Educational Institute opposite the Israeli 'separation wall' at Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem. The wishes and prayers could also include ideas for non-violent actions. Sending a message is an important way of communicating with many people who long to hear a word of hope. People in Bethlehem greatly appreciate receiving wishes and prayers from people outside the region, both as personal and spiritual gestures of comfort and hope on the occasion of Christmas. These messages are one way of breaking through the isolation they live in.

Please e-mail your Christmas messages and prayers for peace before 25th December 2008 (Western Christmas) and/or 7th January 2009 (Eastern Christmas). While English is the preferred language, non-native English speakers may also send wishes and prayers in their mother tongue. Messages can be e-mailed to the Arab Educational Institute at the following address: aei@p-ol.com

Read all messages at www.aeicenter.org and www.paxchristi.net

ASYLUM: a Touchstone for Human Rights

Wednesday 10 December, 6.15 pm at Westminster Abbey

An advent lecture to mark Human Rights Day (60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948), given by Nicholas Sagovsky, Canon Theologian of Westminster Abbey, Commissioner on the Independent Asylum Commission and author of 'Christian Tradition and the Practice of Justice' (SPCK 2008). All are welcome, tickets not required.

RECLAIM CHRISTMAS - Shop less; Live more; Save the earth

Operation Noah's Advent campaign encourages us to experience the month in its traditional sense, as a period of quiet reflection and eager anticipation for the birth of Christ, rather than a time to buy and consume more than we and our earth can afford. Go to www.operationnoah.org for resources, including a liturgy created by Mark Dowd, posters, children's drama, and prayer card.

THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

Towards sustainable economies and livelihoods

A day conference organised by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland on **Tuesday 20 January 2009**, 10am - 4pm at Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR

The aim of the conference is to reflect theologically on the root causes of the current economic crisis and the response of the churches in terms of their prophetic, pastoral and partnership roles and responsibilities.

Keynote speakers include **Bob Goudzwaard** (Professor Emeritus of Economics and Social Philosophy at the Free University in Amsterdam), **Ann Pettifor** (former head of the Jubilee 2000 debt relief campaign, consultant to Operation Noah) and **Dave Bookless** (Director of A Rocha UK).

More information available from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland www.ctbi.org.uk 020 7654 7254.

Please email mary.gandy@ctbi.org.uk to register your interest in attending.

ECO-CONGREGATION CO-ORDINATOR, England & Wales

Eco-congregation England & Wales is seeking to recruit a part-time co-ordinator to oversee the programme. Providing the most comprehensive resources for churches, Eco-congregation seeks to encourage congregations to weave environmental issues and care for creation into every aspect of the life of the church.

Working with key people in the denominations, and in other NGOs, the co-ordinator will spread the word about the programme whilst providing help and support to churches engaging in the process.

Please send a CV to Steve Hughes, A Rocha UK, 18/19 Avenue Road, Southall, Middx UB1 3BL. Closing date: 5 January 2009. See <http://ew.ecocongregation.org/node/673> for further information.

PUBLIC ISSUES CALENDAR 2009

Each year, the Joint Public Issues Team prepares a calendar of Sundays/Weeks for which organisations involved in social justice offer information and worship resources. The 2009 edition is now finalised and available at www.jointpublicissues.org.uk > Resources for churches.

Start planning now for dates in early 2009:

31 January - 8 February: Poverty and Homelessness Action Week, 'Voices from the Edge'

See www.actionweek.org.uk for resources or contact either of the organising agencies: Housing Justice (020 7723 7273); Church Action on Poverty (0161 236 9321).

8 February: Education Sunday, 'The Earth is the Lord's. How then shall we teach?'

See www.educationsunday.org for information and resources.

PARTNERSHIP FOR DEVELOPMENT - Working together with agencies, business, campaigning groups, governments and producers

Ecumenical World Development Consultation for all seeking to involve their churches in poverty and justice issues; **Wednesday 18 - Friday 20 March 2009** at High Leigh Conference Centre, Hoddesdon, Herts. The theme will be explored through presentations, workshops and worship.

For further details/booking form, contact Flo Dagama, Churches Team, Christian Aid, PO Box 100, London SE1 7RT (fdagama@christian-aid.org ; 020 7523 2180).

Contact

If you would like to receive the Joint Public Issues Team Newsletter, or would like to publicise an event or project, please contact Wendy Cooper, wendy.cooper@urc.org.uk ; 020 7916 8632 ; address - URC, 86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT.